



Reciprocal Mentoring: An Innovative Clinical Exercise

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Abstract

Reciprocal mentoring is a relationship concept that harnesses the power of mentoring into a mutually beneficial relationship in which participants take turn learning from each other. Nursing students enrolled in a gerontology course participated in a reciprocal mentoring assignment instead of a traditional clinical placement. This was a pilot study using a qualitative design. 15 students were paired with 15 older adults to learn about the process of aging from each other. Three themes emerged after data analysis namely, competency in assessment skills, increased knowledge of aging and more positive outlook of aging.

Background

Reciprocal mentoring was first used by Fortune 500 companies to pair technologically savvy junior employees (millennials) with middle-aged CEOs. The millennials shared technology skills with the CEOs who in turn shared their knowledge of leadership skills and social ethics with the juniors (Firestone, 2014).

This nurse educator experienced difficulty securing clinical placement sites and was challenged to “think outside the box” to meet those needs. Reciprocal mentoring instead of a clinical practicum was a response to those challenges. Although reciprocal mentoring is predominantly a practice in the business world, the principles of older and younger individuals learning from each other were applicable.

This presentation describes the results of the reciprocal mentoring initiative in which nursing students and older adults partnered to teach each other about aging.

Methodology

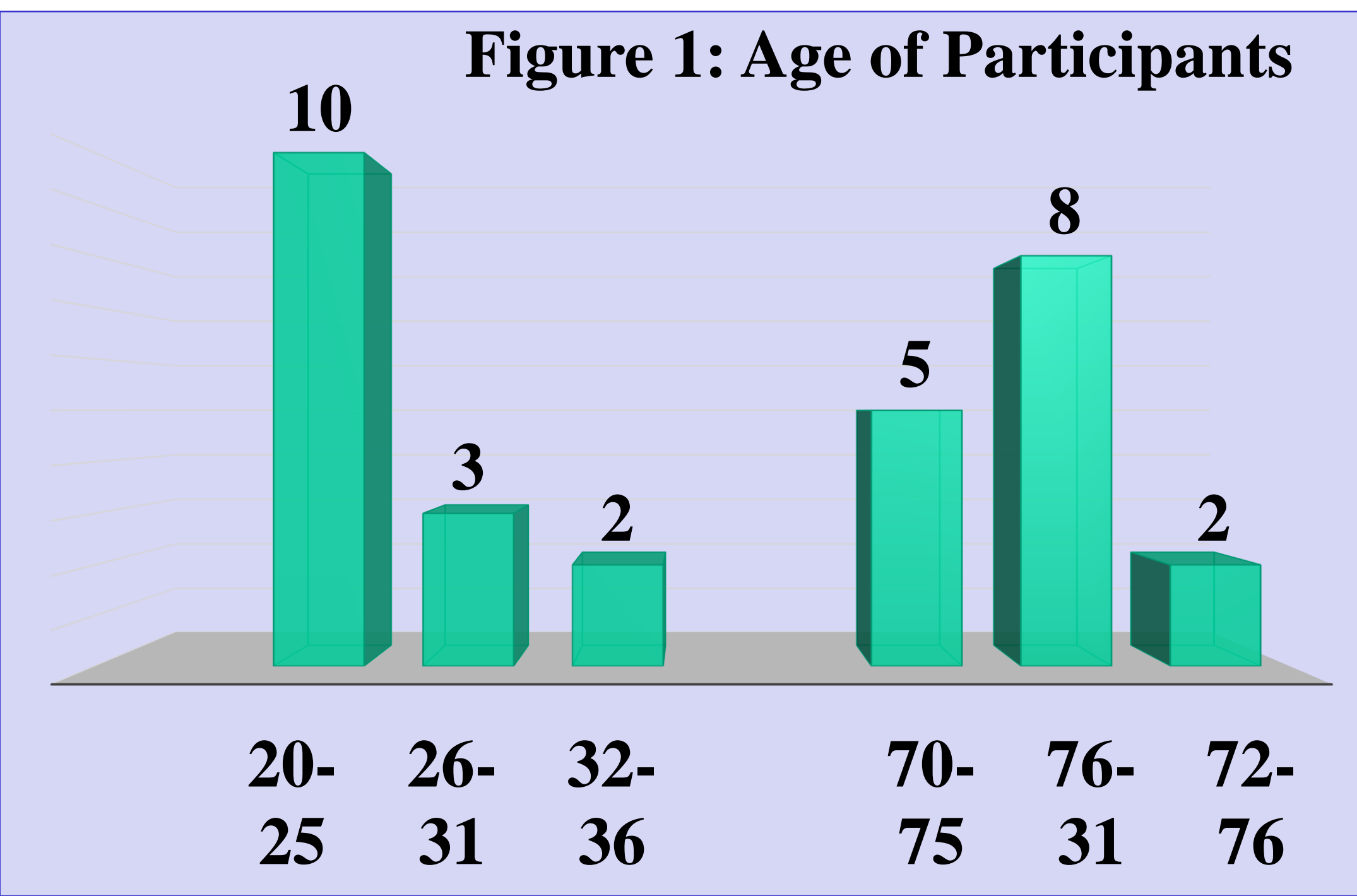
Qualitative Design:
15 nursing students (mentors) and 15 older adults (mentees) participated in the project. Participants met weekly for 16 weeks to teach and learn from each other.

Participants completed an evaluation responding to the following open-ended questions: a) what was most useful? b) what was least useful ? c) how can the mentoring process be improved?

Students wrote weekly reflective journals about the mentoring experience.

Data from the surveys and journals were analyzed for emerging themes.

Procedures



Objectives

- Describe the normal changes of aging
- Identify interventions designed to promote health
- Describe the factors that affect the health and illness status of older adults
- Identify side effects of common medications often used to treat chronic conditions in older adults

The Intervention

Nursing students (mentors) were paired with older adults (mentees), to learn from each other. Mentors shared gerontological nursing content with mentees who reciprocated by sharing the lived experiences of being an older adult.

Start of the Semester

- Mentors identified a mentees, an adult age 70 years or older.
- Mentors and mentees established the rules of engagement such as, meeting time, place and nature of discussions.

During the Semester

Mentors attended weekly classes for two hours. Some content were:

- Ageism and global aging
- Physical, social and emotional changes of aging
- Cognitive decline
- Elder abuse and exploitation
- Romance and aging
- Legal and ethical challenges for older adults
- The cost of living for older adults
- Healthcare literacy
- Polypharmacy

Mentors and mentees met weekly. Mentors shared content discussed in class, mentees shared their lived experiences as it related to the topic being discussed. Mentors used assigned questions to facilitated discussion.

Mentors and mentees completed health screens to identify health risk for depression, polypharmacy, and malnutrition.

Mentors wrote weekly journals about the mentoring experience.

End of Semester: Mentors and Mentees completed an evaluation.

Results and Discussion

Evaluation

Most Useful: The process: a) increased knowledge about aging, b) convenient, c) focused, d) nonthreatening, e) practical and, f) opportunity to give back.

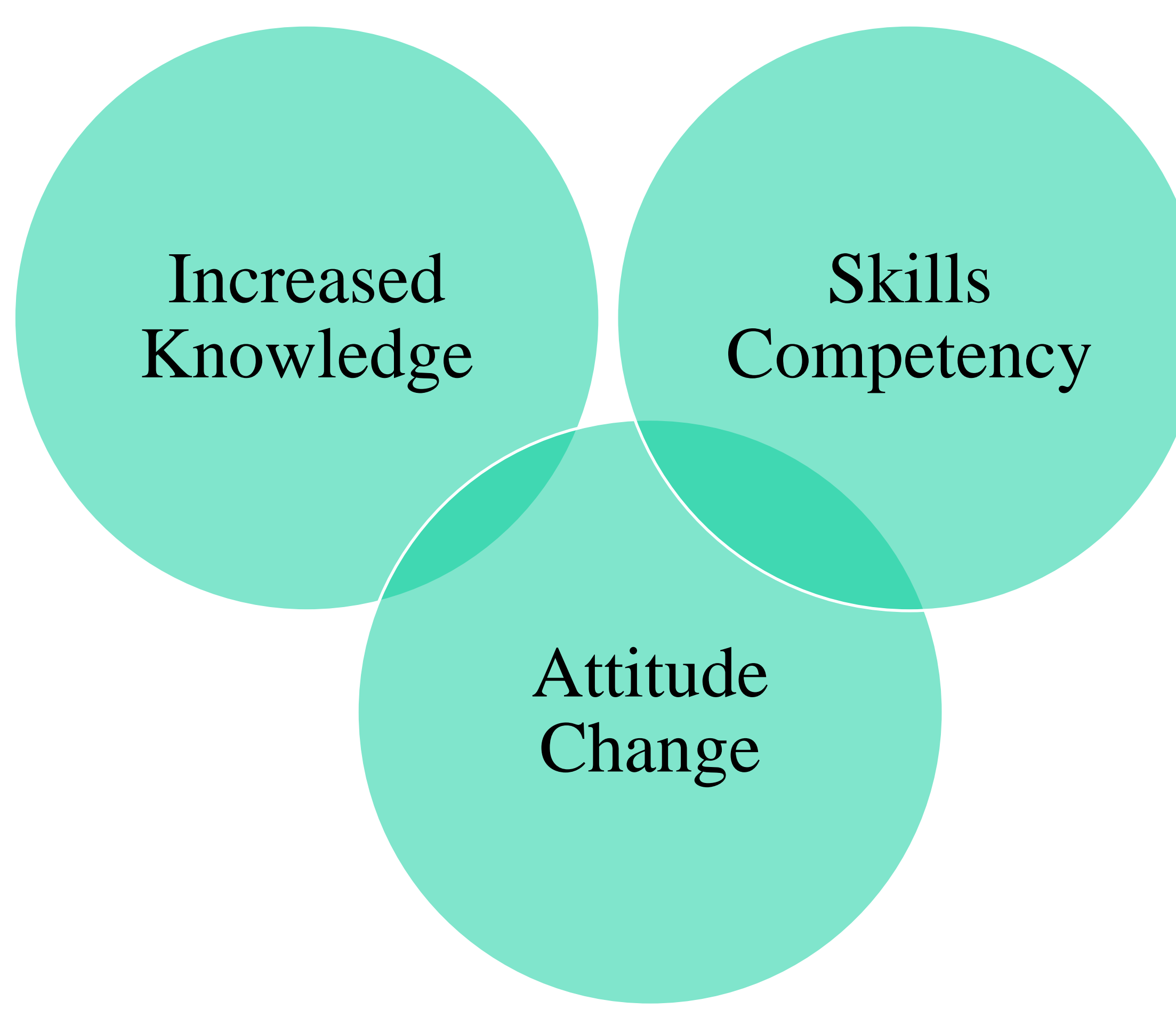
Least Useful: Weekly face-to-face meetings, sometimes inconvenient.

Suggestion for Improvement: Use of technology to enhance communication.

Weekly Reflective Journals:

The following themes were identified after data analysis:

Figure 2: Themes From Reflective Journals



Results and Discussion

Reciprocal mentoring was an effective teaching and learning strategy. For example, mentors reported gaining competency in assessment skills, in-depth knowledge about the complexities of aging and developed more empathy and affection for older adults. Mentees reported gaining more in-depth meaning of their aging experiences and learned new health promotion strategies. Both mentors and mentees valued the new bond that was the result of the experience.

Conclusion

Reciprocal mentoring is a worthwhile initiative and should be considered for use in other academic settings.

Recommendations for future use include:

- Repeat the initiative
- Develop a survey instrument to measure the effectiveness of reciprocal mentoring as a teaching strategy
- Use technology to enhance communication between mentor and mentee

Reference:

Firestone, K. (2014). Reciprocal mentoring with millennials. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/karen-firestone/reciprocal-mentoring-with-b_4178586.html